

Aptos residents come out against 84-unit project

Petitions are now being circulated among some Aptos area homeowners in opposition to a proposed 84-unit condominium project planned for Sumner Avenue.

An environmental impact report (EIR) has been written on the condominiums, which will be constructed on a seven-plus acre strip of land between Sumner Avenue and the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, opposite Doris and Los Altos Avenues.

A copy of the EIR is available for review in the Aptos branch library until Aug. 12, with comments and criticisms on the report due in the county planning by Aug. 13, Asst. Planner Susan Bok said this week.

To build the 84 units as proposed by the Hawaii-San Francisco Investment Co., the property will have to be rezoned from the RM-5-PD to RM-3-PD zoning, and go through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. But no public hearings on the application have yet been scheduled by the county.

One resident said Wednesday that petitions are being circulated in the neighborhood, challenging the EIR's conclusions that a 73-percent projected increase in traffic on Sumner Drive as a direct result of the project would not result in a significant adverse impact on the community.

"The units won't do the area any good so far as the quality of life and the value of our homes are concerned," adds Doris Avenue resident Jack James.

In the report prepared by consultant Kate Burdick, the project is described as 45 three-bedroom units, 36 two-bedroom, and three one-bedroom units.

And to meet the mandate of the county's Measure J, 18 of the units, or 15 percent of the total, will be "low income housing." As now planned, they will be built on a very narrow strip of land near Doris Avenue.

The EIR points out that the anticipated rezoning of the property would allow 11 units per acre, midrange of the Aptos general plan's recommendations of 8-14 units.

In summarizing the benefits and deficits of the project, if built, the report points out several "unavoidable project impacts," including:

- The increased potential for erosion during and immediately after construction.
- An increase in water runoff and peak storm flows during the rainy season

because of more impervious ground surfaces.

- Increased degradation of surface waters because of contamination by urban pollutants.

- Destruction of wildlife habitats.

- Creation of low income housing in an area of significant train noise.

- Increase in traffic on area thoroughfares and a long term contribution to the degradation of the ambient air quality levels.

- Short term localized disturbances due to construction activities.

Singled out by Ms. Burdick as having the greatest effects were the construction of the low income housing near the railroad track on small lots, and the destruction of the wildlife habitat which is suitable for use by migratory and resident animals and birds.

But looking at the other side of the ledger, there are some beneficial impacts for the project, including the construction of new housing in an area currently experiencing a "housing shortage;" the provision of 18 units of low income housing; creation of construction-related jobs for six months to one year with associated economic benefits to the local community; the potential for enhancement and rehabilitation of the on-site riparian resources; and construction by the applicant of all necessary public service improvements including roads, sewers and other requirements.

There are three alternatives to the project cited by Ms. Burdick, including "no project" and a reduction in the number of units to be built, and use as a park.

A denial of the project would include elimination of all impacts on natural resources and public service districts; a financial loss to the applicant, and loss of 18 units of low income housing to the Rio del Mar area.

A reduction in the density would result in less storm water runoff, more area available for drainage retention basins on the property, increase the cost of each unit, reduce the demand for public services, provide fewer low income housing units in the Rio del Mar area and reduce tax revenues.

Use as a park site would require purchase of the site by the state or county, eliminate any residential development on the property, require financial support from local residents and municipal jurisdictions, and ensure retention of open space and wildlife values.